On the NEGLECT of PUBLIC WORSHIP;

A LETTER TO A YOUNG GENTLEMAN.

Not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together.

HEB. X. 25.

It is a clear Point of Juſtice toward God, as to render all Obedience to him, ſo particularly that which conſiſteth in an open Acknowledgment and Service of him, &c.

Barrow's Serm. on Rom. xii. 17.

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MDCCLXXVI.

BRITISH MUSEUM

On the NEGLECT of

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

SIR,

IT was with much concern, that I lately heard what an alteration your gay companions had made in you, and what your neglect now was of all public worſhip.

This neglect is, really, ſo *Indecent*,

Is ſo very *Imprudent*,

Is ſo *Contrary* to the *maxims* of the *wiſeſt Heathen*,

Is ſo expreſſive of direct *Atheiſm*,

Is ſo extenſively and greatly *miſchievous*; that, I ſhould think, if you duly conſidered it, you could not ſuffer it to be any longer your reproach.

I. I may well be allow'd to call it--*Indecent*,

As it is by no means conſiſtent with *good manners*;

As it is an open breach of the *Laws* of your Country;

As it is an avowed contempt of the *Religion* of your Country.

1. According to the Rules of *good manners*, we ſhould comply with the cuſtomary practice, in whatever it is juſtifiable.

Singularity is mere Perverſeneſs, or fooliſh Affectation, where it is not founded on what is fitting and right. Every man of ſenſe is willing to *act* with his neighbour, wherever it is not of importance to ſhew that he *thinks* for himſelf. Faſhion ſhould always direct us, where it is not contrary to Reaſon.

In all caſes in which Duty doth not require us to oppoſe *common Uſage*, it ſhould be as much a rule to us for our conduct, as for our language. And if you may not believe, that, to attend the public worſhip, is the performance of a duty, you, ſurely, cannot judge any duty to be violated by your attending it: You cannot judge it to be blameable to act herein with the generality, and, therefore, you, in civility, ought to do it.

According to good manners we ſhould, likewiſe expreſs a proper deference to that which appears to be the ſenſe of the Community.

In things, with which, from our profeſſion or trade, we cannot but be ſuppoſed better ac-

acquainted, than they are whoſe application has been of a different kind, we have juſt ground to treat a popular opinion, as no rule for ours: but, when in matters of common life, in points to which the diſcernment of every man may fitly be thought to extend, we ſhew an utter diſregard to the well-adviſed determinations of our fellow-citizens, there is plainly an offence againſt that Decorum, which a liberal education directs us to obſerve.

We very fitly, indeed, endeavour to be *wiſer* and *better* than others; but it is, by no means, *Wiſdom*, to behave as if we were the only wiſe —as if we conſidered the eſtabliſhed regulations of a ſtate, to be checks proper enough for others, but not at all neceſſary to be ſubmitted to by us. Err we often do, as to the proportion of diſcernment we aſſign ourſelves, but *their* ſhare of diſcernment the *Generality* may, in *many points*, juſtly claim; and can in *none* be more unfitly oppoſed, than in thoſe which reſpect public order and peace. Not to join in the meaſures agreed on by them for theſe purpoſes, may juſtly expoſe us to the reproach of but ill underſtanding what is decent, or not at all conſulting it.

Further, we ſhould, in good manners, carefully avoid whatever would give offence to thoſe among whom we are converſant. It is this *care* which diſtinguiſhes the civiliſed, from

the ſavage—the well-educated, from the undiſciplined and uninformed part of our ſpecies. The more this care appears, ſo much the more humanity, the better breeding, the more politeneſs we always aſcribe to the perſon in whom we ſee it.

He who neglects to join with the reſt of his Diſtrict in a homage of the Deity, may well be ſuppoſed to regard them as people, who do but ill know how to employ their leiſure, and whoſe Devotion doth little credit to their *Capacity*.

A cenſure, which how it muſt be taken by the diſcerning part of thoſe who fall under it, you cannot be at a loſs to determine.

And, is it unworthy your conſideration, that, by ſuch an avowed contempt of all public worſhip, you give the greateſt offence to thoſe, whom no one, who has a proper ſenſe of Decorum, would willingly offend? You, hereby, chiefly offend the ſerious, the well-diſpoſed, thoſe who are moſt averſe from diſguſting any, thoſe who have at heart the cauſe of Virtue, who, as they are ſolicitous for the *general Good*, cannot but be much grieved when they ſee *that irreligion* countenanced, the ſpreading of which will neceſſarily obſtruct it.

2. How

2. How unbecoming it is to perſiſt in an open breach of the Laws of our Country, cannot be queſtioned by him who will not call in queſtion the expediency of having any Laws.

If I will make convenience the Rule of my obedience to the Law, another may as juſtly take the ſame Rule for his: and thus, while each pays ſubjection only in the way he likes, univerſal diſorder muſt be the neceſſary conſequence.

The plain language of our Statutes is—*All perſons*, inhabiting within the King's Dominions, ſhall, having no lawful excuſe, endeavour to reſort to their Pariſh-church, or to ſome uſual place where Common-prayer ſhall be uſed, every *Sunday*, &c.*——All perſons ſhall, on every Lord's day, apply themſelves to the obſervation of the ſame, by exerciſing themſelves in Piety and true Religion, *publicly* and privately, &c.†

3. Your abſence from all public worſhip I cannot, likewiſe, but ſtyle *Indecent*, as it is an avowed contempt of the Religion of your Country. This, whatever your private opinion may be of it, claims from you an outward reſpect, ſince nothing is held more ſa-

* 1 Eliz. Ch. 2. Sect. 4.

† 29 Charl. II. Ch. 7. Sect. 1.

cred

cred by, nothing is dearer to, All, who are in earneſt in the Profeſſion of it; which may well induce you to forbear ſo rude an attack upon it, as is made by that part of your conduct, to which I am now objecting.

If an endeavour to introduce a ſyſtem of Faith and Morals, more perfective of human nature, and more productive of happineſs to mankind, than that which is at preſent eſtabliſhed among us, was your motive to ſuch an inſult on what is thus eſtabliſhed, I could not deſire that Conſcience ſhould give place to Civility—it would not be right to expect you ſhould ſhew any complaiſance towards opinions, which your very deſire of the welfare of thoſe who received them prompted you to extirpate.

But when you ſeek to pull down, without the leaſt thought of rebuilding—when you are active in removing the reſtraints that our Depravity is under, without a view of ſubſtituting any in their ſtead—when you alike diſcountenance Communion with the National Church and with every other, what ſofter Epithet can I give this way of acting, than that of Indecent? And how properly may I recommend to your Conſideration, That,

Want of Decency is want of Senſe?

POPE.

II. *Im-*

II. *Imprudence* is what I have next charged you with.

A degree of it there is in every departure from good manners—in all actions out of character—in whatever is improperly done by us, and ſhews us to be leſs attentive to what the ſociety in which we live may juſtly expect from us. But our *Imprudence* is great in thoſe omiſſions, which can ſcarcely be otherwiſe than the ſource of much *inconvenience and uneaſineſs to us.* And, I believe, it will be difficult to name what is the cauſe of more to the head of a family, than the irreligion of its members. The bad principles of the huſband, the father, the maſter, where his capacity is not extremely low, too eaſily inſinuate themſelves into his wife, children, ſervants; and there cannot be a plainer diſcovery of his principles than his practice; nor of his having very bad principles, than ſuch a practice as makes it evident that he is indifferent how far he contributes to efface, in thoſe who obſerve him, all reverence of a Deity.

I know you will ſay, that you are not unwilling your family ſhould go to Church, and that you even frequently order them to do it. But which will weigh moſt with them, your orders or your example? Can they ſuppoſe you to think it of any moment that mankind

ſhould

ſhould be influenced by the fear of God, when they ſee you utterly negligent of what alone will preſerve in them the fear of him? Will they ſee a reaſon for *their* joining in the public worſhip, which is not one for *your* doing it?

Your *Children* may obey your *orders*, whilſt they dare not do otherwiſe; but they will be ſure not to forget your *unſuitable example:* and when moved by it to ſlight all the reſtraints of Religion, they will, probably, when they ceaſe to be under your controul, go all thoſe lengths of guilt to which their inclinations lead them.

Nor is it to be believed, that the pattern you ſet your *Servants* will weigh leſs with them, than your giving them leave, or even enjoining them, not to follow it: You may juſtly fear, that they will rather mind what you *do*, than what you *ſay*—that from the irreligion to which your conduct leads them, they will not be with-held by your *Injunctions*—that they will adopt *principles* ſuitable to that diſregard of the Deity which you expreſs, and be induced, by thoſe *principles*, to conſult their pleaſure or profit in ſuch ways, as cannot but be very prejudicial to you.

The Parent and Maſter, who have much ſerioufneſs, have not always an equal diſcretion; and the depravity of ſome under their care

care may be ſuch, as the beſt both advice and example cannot correct. It is not, therefore, to be imagined, but that great regularity in the heads of a family may ſometimes fail in influencing thoſe under their government: But I am perſuaded, that as you will often ſee the uniform piety of the One producing the happieſt effects on the Other, ſo it will rarely be found, that a neglect of the duties of Religion in the former, is not the cauſe of great hurt to the Morals of the latter, and of ſuch hurt as deeply affects the preſent intereſt of the perſons who occaſioned it.

There is nothing more abſurd than to think that a Son or a Servant will go juſt thoſe lengths of irreligion, which you would connive at in him. When he is advanced as far as your practice will lead him, be aſſured that he will not ſtop there, but proceed to all thoſe crimes which ſuit his depraved affections, and from which he is not with-held by ſenſe of Shame, or dread of the Law.

As the extenſive and great *miſchief* which may enſue from your conduct cannot be ſhewn, but it muſt, at the ſame time, evidence the *Imprudence* of it; I ſhall *here* inſiſt no longer on *this point*, but refer the additional proofs of it to what will be ſaid on the *other*.

III. That in a neglect of all common worſhip you act contrary to the maxims of the wiſeſt Heathen, may be made appear—

From the eſtabliſhments of their Lawgivers—

From the accounts we have of their practice—

From the ſentiments which their writings expreſs.

Did you ever read of the Commonwealth that was founded without any proviſion for public worſhip? What hiſtory mentions a civiliſed people, which had not their temples, their altars, their places where the Deity was publicly adored?

Many whimſical things have been enacted by the ſeveral *Lawgivers*; but I know not of Any, who have ſuppoſed that a *Society* could be kept in order, unleſs the members of it joined in ſome ſolemn rites, which might contribute to preſerve in them a reverence of the Deity.

When *Lycurgus* was aſked, Why he enjoined oblations of little price? his Anſwer was—That *None* might fail in paying their acknowledgments to the Gods.

In

In *Plato*'s tenth Book of *Laws*, the aſſertion of the Exiſtence of a Deity, and of his regard to what is right, having been conſidered as a proper Introduction to all Laws, it follows—That, from the Eaſt to the Weſt, or throughout the extent of the Earth, All men, Barbarians as well as *Greeks*, are ſeen and heard proſtrating themſelves, and ſupplicating the Deity.

The *Athenians* are repreſented, as, in the moſt flouriſhing ſtate of their Commonwealth, taking particular care that the religious rites of their Anceſtors ſhould be conformed to.

As *Tully* ſays in one place—That All men think the Gods they have received from their Anceſtors ſhould be diligently worſhipped: ſo he elſewhere remarks, that though the *Romans* might be, in ſome particulars, excelled by other nations, they were not equalled by any in regard to the duties of Religion.

And *Pliny* conſiders it as an *ancient uſage* among them, *well and wiſely eſtabliſhed*, to begin all their Undertakings with Prayers for their ſucceſs.

The moſt ancient of the Heathen Writers prefaces his account of the firſt battle he deſcribes, with a relation of the ſolemn ſacrifice

at which the Chiefs of the *Greeks* attended to implore the bleſſing of Heaven on their Arms: and, throughout the *Iliad*, Prayer is inculcated, as requiſite to precede all our undertakings.

It was, as *Plutarch* informs us, the daily practice of *Alexander* the Great, when his leiſure admitted of it, the firſt thing he did, to ſacrifice to the Gods.

The ſame Writer obſerves of *Julius Cæſar*, that, when it was told him that *Pompey*'s forces were coming out of their trenches to give him battle, he order'd his ſoldiers to ſtop, and firſt made ſupplication to the Gods, then ranged his troops in order of battle.

A like remark I find in this Hiſtorian, concerning *Dion*'s *firſt* offering up prayer to the Gods, and then advancing with his troops againſt the Enemy.

Tully, reaſoning on the propriety of having Temples in Cities, quotes *Pythagoras*, as having aſſerted, that our minds are never in a more pious frame, than when we are employed in the rites of Religion.

When *Socrates* was accuſed of not worſhipping thoſe Gods which were worſhipped by his

his fellow-citizens, he doth not ſeek to juſtify himſelf by alledging any worſhip paid by him in private, but he abſolutely denies the fact, and expreſsly declares, that he did ſacrifice on the public Altars, upon the ſeveral Feſtivals.

They who have the leaſt degree of Reaſon, ſays *Plato*, invoke the Deity, whatever they undertake, whether it be an affair of greater or leſs weight.

The Rule we have in *Iſocrates* is, Worſhip the Deity, as at other times, ſo particularly with your fellow-citizens: You thus will be ſeen, at once, ſacrificing to the Gods, and obeying the Laws.

It is the part of a wiſe man, according to *Tully*, to ſupport the appointments of his Anceſtors, by retaining their religious rites.

I will worſhip the Gods, ſays the Philoſopher in *Stobæus*, diligently, and according to the uſage of my country.

It becomes men to obſerve the religious rites of their Country, is the aſſertion of *Epictetus*; and *Celſus* tells you, That *All* follow the religious rites of their Country; which it ſeems fit they ſhould do, as what is ratified by common conſent ought to be obſerved.

IV. Your

IV. Your practice, in the particular wherein I could wiſh it reformed, I have further conſider'd as expreſſive of direct Atheiſm.

For, what conſtruction can poſſibly be given to a conſtant neglect of the public worſhip of God, but that the perſon, who doth thus neglect it, thinks that there is no need of ſuch worſhip? And to deny the Deity worſhip, is, in effect, to deny his exiſtence.

On this ground it is, that *Epicurus* and his followers have always been charged with Atheiſm. They allowed that certain Deities exiſted; but as they aſſerted—that theſe Deities were wholly taken up with the enjoyments which their abode, at a vaſt diſtance from us, furniſh'd—that they were entirely regardleſs of all human affairs, quite unconcerned whether Man ſerved them or not; it has been truly remark'd, that the *Epicureans* in words admitted the being of a God, but in effect denied it.

On this ground it likewiſe is, That *Ariſtotle* ſays, They who doubt, whether we ought to worſhip the Gods, want puniſhment; as they who doubt, whether the ſnow is white, want ſenſe.

It, certainly, is the ſame thing to mankind, whether there be, or be not, a God, if the ſup-

ſuppoſed God concerns not himſelf at all with their affairs—leaves them at liberty to act as they pleaſe—is indifferent to any homage, which they may be aſſiduous, or negligent, in paying him.

The plain meaning of my never worſhipping God cannot but *appear* to be—that I judge I have nothing to hope or fear, whether I do, or do not, worſhip him; and ſuch a notion is, by the beſt both ancient and modern Writers, branded as an Atheiſtical one.

When it is the eſtabliſhed opinion, that every one who believes there is a God will give ſome public teſtimony of that belief—be ſeen aſſociating with ſome of the community to which he belongs, in the worſhip of God; a judgment will be made of me according to that opinion, and I ſhall be ſure to paſs for a man of *no Religion*, if my having any doth not appear from thoſe acts which are the proper evidences of it.

That the neglect of public worſhip doth juſtly bring on us the charge of Atheiſm, may ſeem unqueſtionable to him, who finds that the ableſt writers on *Natural Religion* conſider public worſhip as a part of the *Religion of Nature*.

Our

Our Countryman *Cumberland*, whoſe treatiſe on this ſubject deſerves, perhaps, as high commendations as can properly be beſtowed on any effort of human wit, thus expreſſes himſelf.

"As in the creation and ſupport of this ſyſtem, which we inhabit, God willed that there ſhould be ſo many *evidences* of his perfections, and ſo framed men, that if they would exert the force of their underſtanding, they could not but obſerve thoſe evidences, he willed that they ſhould know and acknowledge what he is: And as he willed men to be *rational*, that is, to be conſiſtent with themſelves, and not to run into contradictions, he wills that their words and actions ſhould be conſonant to their thoughts of his perfections; that is, he wills them to worſhip and honour him."

Elſewhere he ſpeaks more particularly to the point in hand:—The neceſſity of the divine Dominion, in order to the common, which is the greateſt, Good, being diſcover'd from the natural, and therefore eternal, perfections of God; the natural Law giving him that Dominion, as we have already explained it, is likewiſe diſcover'd. For it is manifeſt, that the right Reaſon of the Deity, which is to him a ſort of natural Law, would from Eternity

aſſume

aſſume the exerciſe of this Dominion, in order to the end aſſigned; and that the right reaſon of Man, as ſoon as it exiſts and perceives this, would neceſſarily approve thereof; ſince it cannot, whilſt it is right, diſſent from the reaſon of God. But a Law being given to acknowledge the Divine Dominion, Laws are given commanding, with reſpect to God, the greateſt love, truſt, hope, gratitude, humility, fear and obedience, and whatever elſe is expreſſed in *invoking him*, *giving him thanks*, hearing his word, and *conſecrating* things, *places*, *times*, *and perſons*, to the *honour of him*, and of *him only*.

There ought to be, ſays the very judicious writer of the *Religion of Nature delineated*, a public worſhip of the Deity. For a man may be conſidered as a member of a *Society*, and *as ſuch* he ought to worſhip God (if he has opportunity of doing it; if there are proper prayers uſed *publicly*, which he may reſort to, and his health, &c. permit). Or, the *ſociety* may be conſidered as *one body*, that has common intereſts and concerns, and *as ſuch* is obliged to worſhip the Deity, and offer one common prayer. Beſide, there are many, who know not of themſelves how to pray; perhaps cannot ſo much as read. Theſe too muſt be taken *as they are*, and conſequently ſome time and place *appointed*, where they

may have ſuitable paayers read to them, and be guided in their devotions.

And further, toward the keeping mankind in order, it is *neceſſary* there ſhould be ſome religion profeſſed, and even eſtabliſhed; which cannot be without ſome public worſhip. And were it not for that ſenſe of virtue, which is *principally* preſerved (ſo far as it is preſerved) by national *forms* and *habits* of religion, men would ſoon loſe it *all*, run wild, prey upon one another, and do what elſe the worſt of ſavages do.

It is a part of Natural Religion, ſays *Puffendorf*, to worſhip God, not only in private, but, likewiſe, openly and publicly.—Public worſhip both teſtifies our own Piety, and excites that of others.

How can we conceive, as *Barbeyrac* expreſſes himſelf, that there is true Piety in the heart, unleſs it ſhew itſelf by ſome outward acts of Religion? Men are ſo made, that they do not think that they ſhew a ſufficient reſpect one to another, if they do not give ſome proofs of it by their ſpeech, or ſome ſignificant action.—We muſt grant, that an outward worſhip is abſolutely neceſſary.

In *Burlamaqui's Principles of the Law of Nature*, c. iv. p. 2. we have the following paſſage:

A

A truly religious man will think it his duty, and find it his pleaſure, to confirm himſelf in ſentiments of piety, and excite them in others. Hence is derived outward worſhip, as well private as public. For, whether we conſider this worſhip as the chief and almoſt only means of exciting, cheriſhing, and perfecting in the heart ſentiments of Religion; or whether we conſider it as an homage which men united in Society, in common, pay the Deity; or whether we take theſe two views of of it in conjunction, Reaſon makes it a DUTY of INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY.

It is natural for men, according to *Wilkins*, who are joined together in Civil Societies, to join likewiſe in Religious Worſhip. And, in order to this, it is neceſſary that there ſhould be public places, and ſolemn times ſet apart for ſuch Aſſemblies: Which hath accordingly been the practice of *All civilized Nations*. And in the manner of performing their public Worſhip, it was ſtill required to be done with all imaginable ſubmiſſion and reverence. This the *Stoic* commends, and cites *Ariſtotle* for it; —"Men are never more concerned to be "humble and modeſt, than when they have "to do about God. We ſhould enter the "Temples with an humble and compoſed de-"meanour. When we approach to ſacrifice, "it ſhould be with all imaginable expreſſions

" of reverence and modeſty, in our counte-
" tenance and carriage."

* If you will be pleaſed to lay together what is here quoted from the beſt Writers on Natural Religion, and what was before related concerning the Practice and Sentiments of the moſt eminent perſons in the Heathen World; the neglect of all public worſhip muſt, I ſhould think, appear to you not harſhly cenſured, when conſider'd as an evidence of abſolute Atheiſm.

V. I have now only to add, That the great and extenſive miſchief, which may proceed from your abſenting yourſelf from the public worſhip, well merits your moſt ſerious conſideration.

A very little knowledge of mankind may ſuffice for our fulleſt conviction what terrible diſorder muſt enſue, were we, generally, without any apprehenſions of a Superintending Providence.

* In a writer, by no means fit to be placed among thoſe above cited, and only taken notice of here, as he was moſt unlikely to have made public worſhip a part of Natural Religion, could he have found any tolerable plea for denying it to be ſo, we meet with this obſervation—
" It is the voice of Nature, that God ſhould be pub-
" licly worſhipped." *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation.*"

It is highly honourable to religion, that the Atheiſtical writers endeavour to account for its introduction, by ſuppoſing it to be a political meaſure to reſtrain man's propenſity to miſchief—to keep him innocent, when he might think his guilt could never come under the cogniſance of any of his ſpecies. How many crimes are there on which human Laws do not at all animadvert! How many of the crimes for which they appoint a puniſhment never receive it, either from the timorouſneſs, or indolence, or corruption of thoſe who ſhould ſee it inflicted! Offenders high in rank defy juſtice—the wealth of others protects them from it—the very pooreſt often eſcape it, by the ſecrecy with which they act; and, uſing more cunning than their Betters, they tranſgreſs with equal impunity.

Let the ſevereſt Laws be enacted and duly executed, what numbers ſhall we find deſpiſing them! How unheeded is the Executioner by a bold neceſſitous villain! In what ſhape can death ſcare us, when inflamed with rage—when intent on revenge? Civil regulations extending thus but to a part of our duty, and ſo feebly enforcing the diſcharge even of that part of it, Society muſt neceſſarily want ſome further ſupport. I ſhould add, with reſpect to human Laws, that as they take notice only of the outward act, they leave

leave us at liberty to allow in ourſelves thoſe inclinations, which, if we do not endeavour to ſuppreſs, we ſhall at length be but ill able to reſiſt. The robber, the murderer, the adulterer, do not at once throw off the reſtraints of conſcience: they gradually fall; and, by long offending in deſire, proceed to do it in act.

How far the defects of human Laws are ſupplied by the belief of a God, is obvious—It induces us to forbear treating any other perſon, as we would not have him to treat us—It takes away all hope of ſecret guilt—It aſſures us, that, whatever our rank or fortune may be, our crimes ſhall not fail to receive the puniſhment they deſerve—It prevents not only the birth, but even the conception, of ſin; and ſecures regularity in our actions, by preſerving it in our inclinations.

Theſe are the proper effects of a firm perſuaſion, that we are under the government of an all-knowing and all-powerful, a perfectly wiſe and juſt God. Nor doth there ſeem to be any way ſo likely to fix this perſuaſion on the mind of man, and to make it general, as that of a public worſhip—as the members of the community aſſembling to pay their joint homage to this infinitely perfect Being.

Care

Care for the neceſſities of life is apt to operate ſo ſtrongly on one part of our ſpecies, and the purſuit of pleaſure ſo much engages the other, that were we ſeverally left to our choice, whether we would pay any acknowledgment to our Creator, it is greatly to be feared, that an entire forgetfulneſs of him would be widely ſpread.

Times and places ſet apart for his ſervice are the only calls that many know to a remembrance of his exiſtence: They would never think of him, if they were never required to join in his worſhip; and it is the weekly repetition of this act which alone keeps up in them a ſenſe of him, as ſure to reward every virtuous man, and puniſh every wicked.

When we are accuſtomed, from our childhood, to meet our neighbours one day in ſeven, in order that we may in common beg of our Creator to preſerve and bleſs us, to deliver us from ſin and all other evil, to make us happy here and continue us ſo ever; it is not to be ſuppoſed, but that we ſhall more frequently think of a God, than we ſhould do, were no ſuch religious aſſemblies held; and that we ſhall be under a greater fear of acting wrong, than would otherwiſe influence us.

I do

I do not ſay, that by ſuch outward homage, the moſt punctually paid, any of us are likely to be made as good as we ought to be.

We have ſad experience to the contrary. But this, I think, may truly be ſaid of it, That it is ſome check to the progreſs of Vice, and that our morals would become much worſe, were this homage wholly neglected. It is a fact which comes under every one's obſervation, that where the lower people abſent themſelves from all public worſhip, they contract a ſavageneſs and brutality of manners, and are too apt to go the greateſt lengths of guilt.

When a ſeventh part of our time is ſet apart for that employment which will make us more conſiderate—which teaches us to act as reaſonable creatures, great advantages may well be expected from it; and, certainly, as great hurt muſt enſue, when, for ſo large a portion of their time, the generality encounter all the temptations to which abſolute idleneſs can expoſe them.

If, as they think that they have no concern with matters of Religion on their days of *Labour*, they judge the ſame of the day on which they are exempted from it, and paſs this day without any Act which can make a ſerious im-

impreſſion upon them; it is very probable that they will, ordinarily, run into great irregularities upon it—into irregularities, which, exhauſting their own ſmall ſtock of money, will ſtrongly entice them to ſuch violence or fraud, as may afford them the ſupply they want.

The leiſure of the wealthy too frequently engages them in ruinous pleaſures, notwithſtanding the many innocent ways of amuſing themſelves, which the advantages of their education and fortune afford: But to what licentiouſneſs muſt we, then, think the poor will proceed, when they are to have a whole day in every week for mere diverſions, and are too apt to reliſh thoſe moſt, which are moſt dangerous to their Virtue!

Set aſide all conſiderations of Religion—Are not Churches the only morality-ſchools of conſiderable numbers, the only places where they hear any thing of their obligations to avoid what may be miſchievous to themſelves or others? And when thoſe obligations are not thoroughly underſtood, or when they are very ſeldom reflected upon, or when the motives enforcing a conformity to them are not ſufficiently known, can the conſequence but be, a miſconduct more or leſs hurtful, as our diſpoſitions are better or worſe, as we are under ſtronger or weaker temptations to offend?

It may be, as you do not desire that the example you set in absenting yourself from all public worship should be follow'd, so you do not suppose that it will be.—You will, perhaps, tell me, that you are but one, and that there is little to be feared from the omissions of one private person.—But surely, Sir, the practice of a whole nation is no more than the practice of many particulars; and whosesoever plea it is—What signifies my behaviour; I am but one? he ought to be reminded that every man may excuse himself in the same manner; and thus what each allows only in himself, may become the general guilt.

In those parts of duty which arise not from our respective states and circumstances, but from considerations equally applicable to persons of all conditions, we should never suppose that *our failure* will be confined to ourselves; we should regard *it* as influencing others to a like *failure*, and *this* as capable of very widely extending itself.

My example, in any departure from duty, is an advice to my neighbour to do the same thing; and it is advice which may so far appear more weighty than what my tongue can give him, because there is seldom reason to think that a man's actions belie his heart, but often the greatest to think so of his professions.

If

If our wrong behaviour being publicly known doth not all the miſchief which might juſtly be feared from it; or if, from the mean opinion entertained of us, it doth very little hurt; this will be but a poor defence of it. We are, certainly, render'd criminal by thoſe actions, the natural conſequences of which are miſchievous; though it ſhould ſo happen, that the evil, which they have a tendency to produce, did not enſue.

I am got to a length, for which I would apologize, were it on a leſs important ſubject.

I am ſure that I have offered you ſome things well deſerving your conſideration, as I have furniſhed you with ſo many extracts, from the beſt both antient and modern Writers; and if they can but engage your attention, they will, I ſhould hope, contribute not a little towards producing that change in your conduct, ſo much wiſhed for by

Your, &c.

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